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Fifty-first session
Agenda item 48

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

[without reference to a Main Committee (A/51/24, para. 15)]

51/241. Strengthening of the United Nations system

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, by which it established the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System,

Recalling in particular paragraph 2 of resolution 49/252,

Taking note of the report of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System,[1]

1. Adopts the text contained in the annex to the present resolution for implementation effective from 1 January 1998;

2. Calls upon the relevant intergovernmental bodies to implement fully the measures specified in the text to strengthen the work of the United Nations system, in particular of the General Assembly and the Secretariat;

3. Requests the Secretary-General, as part of his ongoing efforts to improve the functioning of the Organization, to implement fully those measures specified in the text that are within his competence;

4. Also requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session on the implementation of the present resolution;

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[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 24 (A/51/24).

5. Invites other principal organs, the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system to implement the measures for strengthening the system that are specified in the text and that are within their respective areas of competence, as appropriate;

6. Decides that the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has completed its work as mandated in resolution 49/252.

105th plenary meeting
31 July 1997

ANNEX

I. PURPOSE

1. The Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System has undertaken its work in accordance with the perspective that its mandate for strengthening the United Nations system, derived from General Assembly resolution 49/252 of 14 September 1995, is to better enable the Organization to fulfil the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to meet the aspirations of its Members. It has focused on improving the capacity of the General Assembly to discharge effectively its functions, role and powers and that of the Secretariat to carry out effectively and efficiently the mandates of intergovernmental processes with the necessary transparency and accountability.

2. The Working Group has proceeded on the assumption that adequate resources will be provided to support the United Nations system. It has not seen its mandate as responding to the current financial crisis, which is being considered by the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations. It has also proceeded on the assumption that any Secretariat resources that are freed up as a result of strengthening measures proposed by the Working Group shall be reallocated according to priorities set by the General Assembly, in particular to the economic and social areas.

II. REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

3. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization should be available not later than thirty days prior to the opening of the regular session of the General Assembly in all official languages of the Organization so as to permit due consideration.

4. The introduction to the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization should be in the nature of an executive summary highlighting main issues.

5. The main body of the report shall be comprehensive, informative and analytical in a way that will allow Member States to examine and assess, inter alia, through the debate on the report, the extent to which mandates given by the General Assembly have been fulfilled, as well as to set priorities in the context of the major political, economic and social, administrative and financial issues on its agenda.

6. The Secretary-General shall incorporate a new forward-looking section in his report on the work of the Organization. It shall describe the specific goals for the Secretariat in the year ahead in the context of the work plan for the Organization in the coming year, taking into account the medium-term plan and the fact that the responsibility for establishing priorities rests with the Member States.

7. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization shall be considered in plenary meetings of the General Assembly immediately after the general debate. The President of the Assembly should assess the debate on this item. In the light of that assessment, informal consultations shall be held, under the chairmanship of the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, to discuss action that may be required by the Assembly on the basis of the debate on the report.

8. The General Assembly in plenary meeting may refer sections of the report for more detailed consideration by the Main Committees.

9. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization shall, inter alia, contain an analytical and concise annex elaborating the costs by major programmes and activities of all bodies of the United Nations system, located both in and outside New York, according to their mandates, so as to improve Member States' overview of system-wide issues.

10. The Secretary-General is requested to introduce the report orally at an appropriate time under the agenda item entitled "Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization".

III. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

11. The agenda item entitled "Report of the Security Council" shall continue to be considered in plenary meetings of the General Assembly.

12. The President of the General Assembly shall assess the debate on this item and consider the need for further consideration of the report of the Security Council. In the light of that assessment, informal consultations shall be held after the debate in plenary meetings, under the chairmanship of the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, to discuss the need and content of any action by the Assembly based on the debate.

13. The agenda item shall not be closed but shall remain open to enable further discussion as necessary during the year, bearing in mind, inter alia, the submission of additional reports as and when necessary.

14. The monthly forecast of the programme of work of the Security Council shall be circulated for the information of members of the General Assembly.

IV. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

15. The report of the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly shall be prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996. The report shall also contain an evaluation of the report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, taking into account the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

V. GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

16. The report of the International Court of Justice shall continue to be considered in plenary meetings of the General Assembly. The Assembly shall continue to support the role of the International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ of the Organization, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Assembly shall also continue to encourage the progressive development and codification of international law.

VI. TIMING OF THE PLENARY MEETINGS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

17. The plenary meetings of the General Assembly shall be formally opened every year on the first Tuesday following 1 September, with the election of the President, Vice-Presidents and Chairmen of the Main Committees (the General Committee). The General Committee shall then meet as soon as possible after its election and shall present its report to the General Assembly before the commencement of the general debate.

18. The plenary meetings of the General Assembly shall reconvene in mid-September to consider the report of the General Committee.

VII. THE GENERAL DEBATE

19. There shall continue to be only one general debate each year, beginning in the third week of September.

20. The preparation of the list of speakers for the general debate shall be based on the following principles:

(a) The general debate shall be organized over a period of two weeks so as to maximize possibilities for interministerial contacts;

(b) Member States shall be invited to indicate three preferences for speaking times;

(c) Member States wishing to organize or participate in group meetings during the general debate period shall be encouraged to coordinate their responses to the request for preferences and to indicate this transparently in their responses;

(d) The Secretariat shall be requested to prepare a list of speakers based on existing traditions and expressions of preference to best accommodate Members' needs;

(e) The list of speakers for each day shall be completed and no speakers will be rolled over to the next day, notwithstanding the implications for hours of work.

VIII. TIME LIMITS

21. There shall be no time limits or specified themes for the general debate but the General Assembly will indicate a voluntary guideline of up to twenty minutes for each statement.

22. Outside the general debate there shall be a fifteen-minute time limit in plenary meetings and in the Main Committees.

IX. THE AGENDA

23. Bearing in mind rule 81 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the requirements for reopening debate on an agenda item which the Assembly had decided was completed will continue to be as at present and should be made clear to delegations through a statement from the President of the Assembly. A delegation wishing to reopen debate on an agenda item should send a written request to the President of the Assembly. The President will then undertake soundings to ascertain whether the request enjoys wide support. In the light of these soundings, the President shall announce in the Journal of the United Nations the date of the meeting of the Assembly to consider the question of reopening debate on the item, bearing in mind the requirements of rule 81.

24. The General Assembly shall take further steps to rationalize and streamline the agenda, based on the Guidelines on the Rationalization of the Agenda of the General Assembly agreed to by the Assembly in annex I to its resolution 48/264 of 29 July 1994, and in particular shall make greater use of clustering, biennialization or triennialization of agenda items. Items that could be considered at a later session shall be identified, taking into account the priorities set by the medium-term plan.

25. As a general rule, agenda items that could be considered in the Main Committees shall be referred to the Main Committees rather than the General Assembly in plenary meetings.

26. The Main Committees shall give specific attention to rationalizing their future agenda and shall consider recommending any possible clustering, biennialization or triennialization of items.

X. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

27. The General Assembly is the highest political body with universal membership of the Organization. Consideration of agenda items directly in plenary meetings shall be reserved for urgent issues or issues of major political importance, bearing in mind paragraphs 1 and 2 of annex I to General Assembly resolution 48/264.

28. The President of the General Assembly, with a view to ensuring that there is a systematic and transparent process for participation by delegations in discussions on action to be taken on items considered directly in plenary meetings, shall assess the debate in plenary meetings and, where appropriate, organize open-ended informal consultations, under the chairmanship of the President or one of the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, to discuss the need for and content of any action.

29. The Secretariat shall ensure, in consultation with the President, that priority is accorded to the availability of a meeting room and services to facilitate these consultations.

30. All Main Committees shall hold brief organizational sessions once the General Assembly has taken decisions on the agenda, before the commencement of the general debate. Bureaux of the Main Committees shall meet earlier to draw up recommendations on the organization and programme of work.

31. The Main Committees shall meet in substantive session only after the end

of the general debate.

32. The number of reports requested shall be rationalized where possible so as to permit more focused consideration of issues. All bodies shall exercise restraint in making proposals containing requests for new reports and should consider integrating, biennializing or triennializing the presentation of reports, bearing in mind paragraphs 6 and 7 of General Assembly resolution 50/206 C of 23 December 1995.

XI. THE GENERAL COMMITTEE

33. The General Committee shall use its authority and competence, taking into account rule 43 of the rules of procedure, by allowing Member States that are not represented on the General Committee to participate in its discussions. The process of decision-making will continue to be as at present.

34. The General Committee may, each year, prior to the closure of the session, prepare suggestions based on its experience for the consideration of the incoming General Committee.

35. The General Committee is requested to consider and recommend to the General Assembly methods and procedures for streamlining and rationalizing the Committee's work. The General Committee shall, in this context, in relation to each agenda item proposed, consider its rejection or its inclusion in the provisional agenda, taking into account previous recommendations of the General Committee and previous relevant decisions of the Assembly.

XII. SUBORDINATE MACHINERY

36. The First Committee and the Fourth Committee shall not meet simultaneously and may consider meeting in a sequential manner during the regular session of the General Assembly. This arrangement shall not apply if it affects their respective identities, programmes of work and effective consideration of their agendas.

37. The Disarmament Commission should continue to consider ways to organize its work better, including rationalizing the duration of its sessions.

38. The General Assembly should invite the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization to consider the functions and role of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and to submit a recommendation to the Assembly at its fifty-third session. Meanwhile, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation should be asked to submit its report to the International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organization as well as to the General Assembly. The Assembly would discuss the report along with any International Atomic Energy Agency and World Health Organization evaluation of the report.

39. The Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly for the Mid-term Review of the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s shall conduct its final review and appraisal during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

XIII. THE BUDGET PROCESS AND FULFILMENT OF MANDATES

40. To ensure better transparency and accountability, the medium-term plan shall be the framework for the budget process.

41. The budget process shall be carried out in accordance with relevant General Assembly budget resolutions, in particular resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986, and the relevant provisions of the Financial Rules and Regulations. The importance of continuous and appropriate dialogue on the improvement of current administrative and budgetary practices and procedures is recognized.

42. The Secretary-General shall continue to have flexibility, without prejudice to the fulfilment of mandates, to redeploy, as necessary, within the limits prescribed by the General Assembly budget resolutions and the Financial Rules and Regulations, the human and financial resources necessary to fulfil mandates.

XIV. ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

43. The President of the General Assembly shall be encouraged to take appropriate opportunities to utilize the potential of the office of the President, consistent with the Charter and the mandates of the Assembly, to advance the purposes and principles of the Organization, including regular consultations between the President of the Assembly and the presidents of other organs, particularly the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

44. In order to assist the President in the discharge of his responsibilities, the General Assembly shall request the Secretary-General, after consultation with the President, to include in the next programme budget a proposal for adequate resources to be made available to the President, including, if necessary, through enhanced administrative and personnel support to the office of the President.

XV. TECHNOLOGY

45. The Secretary-General is requested to pursue an information technology plan with a range of options to provide all permanent missions to the United Nations and the wider public with on-line access to documents and relevant United Nations information. Unless the General Assembly decides otherwise, hard copies of documents shall continue to be distributed to permanent missions in accordance with their needs. While welcoming the progress made by the Ad hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council, further efforts in this direction could be pursued within a specified time-frame to harmonize and improve United Nations information systems. All countries, in particular developing countries, shall be assisted in making full use of this potential access. Adequate provision should be made for training delegates. Facilities for such access by delegations within the United Nations premises shall also be expanded as much as possible. Availability of information in this manner should be ensured in all official languages of the United Nations.

46. The Secretary-General is encouraged to include information on the impact of technological improvements in his report on the implementation of mandates, by means of comparing outputs with objectives.

XVI. SYSTEM-WIDE COORDINATION

47. The Secretary-General is requested to elaborate further ways to strengthen system-wide coordination and to report thereon to the General

Assembly.

XVII. OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE SECRETARIAT: EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS

48. The Secretariat shall be held strictly accountable for implementing mandates within allocated budgets.

49. For the Secretariat to operate efficiently in fulfilling mandates, micromanagement of the Secretariat by the General Assembly should be avoided.

50. The Secretary-General is encouraged to submit proposals to the General Assembly to improve the presentation of the programme performance report so as to enable the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Main Committees of the General Assembly, without prejudice to the provisions of section VI of resolution 45/248 B of 21 December 1990, as reaffirmed in resolution 51/221 of 18 December 1996, to consider the portions of the report related to their substantive work with reference to the medium-term plan, with a view to facilitating the consideration of the programme performance report by the Fifth Committee.

51. There shall be a more detailed and structured examination in the Main Committees of the relevant reports of the Board of Auditors, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Office of Internal Oversight Services in relation to the substantive work of these Committees.

52. Accountability and intergovernmental oversight shall be improved by periodic coordination meetings between the Board of Auditors, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Joint Inspection Unit, with appropriate input from the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

53. "Question time" in all Main Committees would enable a dynamic and candid interchange with responsible Secretariat officials to facilitate the work of the Main Committees in their assessment of fulfilment of mandates, productivity and related issues.

54. Every effort should be made to ensure that the measures referred to above take into account and are mutually reinforcing of the programme evaluation activities carried out by other competent intergovernmental bodies.

XVIII. AREAS FOR MORE INTENSIVE WORK BY OVERSIGHT MACHINERY

55. The relevant bodies should request the external and internal oversight machinery to give early attention to, among others, the following areas and to report thereon periodically to the General Assembly:

(a) Practice and procedures in the employment of consultants;

(b) Practice and procedures in short-term contract employment;

(c) Practice and procedures with respect to recruitment;

(d) Productivity gains actually achieved from investment in technology and the impact of the postponement/deferral of upgrading technological systems on the long-term functioning of the Organization;

(e) Practice and procedures for appointments at the senior level;

(f) Practice and procedures for procurement and the award of contracts;

(g) An evaluation of conflict of interest issues, in particular for personnel dealing with employment decisions and the award of procurement and contracts;

(h) Practice and procedures in the establishment and use of trust funds;

(i) Practice and procedures with regard to personnel on loan;

(j) Any other issue recommended by the General Assembly.

XIX. THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

56. The process of selection of the Secretary-General shall be made more transparent.

57. The General Assembly shall make full use of the power of appointment enshrined in the Charter in the process of the appointment of the Secretary-General and the agenda item entitled "Appointment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations".

58. The duration of the term or terms of appointment, including the option of a single term, shall be considered before the appointment of the next Secretary-General.

59. In the course of the identification and appointment of the best candidate for the post of Secretary-General, due regard shall continue to be given to regional rotation and shall also be given to gender equality.

60. Without prejudice to the prerogatives of the Security Council, the President of the General Assembly may consult with Member States to identify potential candidates endorsed by a Member State and, upon informing all Member States of the results, may forward those results to the Security Council.

61. In order to ensure a smooth and efficient transition, the Secretary-General should be appointed as early as possible, preferably no later than one month before the date on which the term of the incumbent expires.

XX. SENIOR MANAGEMENT

62. The senior management structure should be considered in the context of the overall structure of the Organization, desired lines of authority and decision-making.

63. The Organization shall have a clear pyramid structure. To that end, the functions and number of under-secretaries-general, special representatives of the Secretary-General and assistant secretaries-general should be reviewed and streamlined by the Secretary-General, and lines of authority and decision-making made transparent.

64. Member States note the Secretary-General's decision to establish a Policy Coordination Group as a means to enhance coordination in the terms

explained by him to Member States.

65. The principles of equitable geographical distribution and gender balance shall be reflected in appointments to senior positions, including heads of programmes, funds and other United Nations bodies.

66. The principle enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/232 of 2 March 1992 that there should be no monopoly on senior posts by nationals of any State or group of States should be strictly observed and implemented. The Secretary-General should keep the Assembly regularly informed of his/her actions on those matters.

67. The Secretary-General is encouraged to consider uniform terms and term limits in his appointments to senior management posts.

XXI. HEADS OF PROGRAMMES, FUNDS AND OTHER UNITED NATIONS BODIES

68. Affirming the role of the General Assembly in approving appointments and extension of terms, uniform terms of office of four years, renewable once, should be introduced for the executive heads of programmes, funds and other bodies of the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

69. The specialized agencies are also encouraged to consider uniform terms and term limits for their executive heads.

XXII. GENERAL STAFFING ISSUES

70. It is essential for the successful functioning of the Organization that it has a career international civil service for its core functions. There is also an important role for term contracts for various categories of staff.

71. The Secretary-General shall be encouraged, in accordance with legislative mandates, to ensure a judicious mix of career and fixed-term appointments, so as to have an appropriate balance between institutional memory, long-term commitment and independence and the ability to bring in fresh insights and expertise, and to dismiss non-performing staff.

72. Short-term appointments should not be used as an entry to career positions. A review should be undertaken of staff on short-term appointments.

73. Staff development and training shall be encouraged along with a cost-effective common training system to be developed for personnel of the Secretariat, funds and programmes.

74. The provisions of the Charter giving due regard to the importance of recruiting staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible shall be implemented. In this regard, the principle of gender balance shall be observed within the Organization. In achieving gender balance, the principle of equitable geographical distribution shall be respected.

75. The quality of the language services shall be enhanced, including through the provision of effective management practices, bearing in mind that all official languages of the United Nations are of equal importance in this regard.

XXIII. PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

76. The system of in-career promotion shall be made more transparent.

77. A planned rotation among different departments as well as between Headquarters and the field level, as appropriate, as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 49/222 A of 23 December 1994, as one way of enhancing experience and skills, should be developed and submitted to the Assembly.

78. The performance appraisal system shall be subject to periodic review and audit and comparative statistics should be maintained for review by the General Assembly.

XXIV. SECRETARIAT REMUNERATION

79. The General Assembly shall request the International Civil Service Commission to prepare proposals for a possible system of performance-based remuneration for its consideration.

80. The General Assembly shall reiterate that topping up of remuneration of their nationals in any way by Member States is not acceptable and shall request the Secretary-General to report on the matter.

XXV. INDEPENDENCE OF THE SECRETARIAT

81. Further efforts shall be made, consistent with Article 101 of the Charter to pay due regard to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

82. Compliance with Article 100 (2) of the Charter is of fundamental importance and it would be timely to call upon Member States scrupulously to observe Article 100 (2) and to request the Secretary-General to prepare guidelines on what constitutes acceptable representations to him and his staff on appointments.

83. Consistent with Article 101 of the Charter, Secretariat guidelines for staff members on financial interests shall include a requirement at all levels of senior management for specified financial disclosures at the time of appointment and on a regular basis. These financial statements shall be dealt with on a basis of confidentiality.